



FROM THE COAST

Blaze Aid Leaves Esperance

In November, Esperance was put on the map after some of the worst bushfires in the state's history in more than 50 years. 300,000 hectares of land was burnt, four lives were lost, many homes gone and damaged and stocks and crops destroyed. As the focus shifted from protecting lives and removing people from immediate danger, the community moved from response to recovery mode.

On the 9th of December, volunteer organisation Blaze Aid arrived at a time when many in the community were still reeling from the events which took place. This generous and fantastic bunch of people got stuck in helping our farmers rebuild and repair the fire damaged fencing and structures. 164 people volunteered in the last 4 months to assist with 35 properties, clearing more than 900km of fencing and rebuilding 82km of fences.

The main camp was established in the tiny town of Grass Patch, 123km south of Norseman and 78km north of Esperance on the Coolgardie-Esperance Hwy. There were so many unknowns – where do they start? How long will they be required? What will they eat? Camp Coordinators Chris and John Smale set up the volunteer camp at the town oval, using the hall and its conveniences and volunteers were largely responsible for their own accommodation living in their own caravans and motor homes.

While some power was available they were hardly living in the lap of luxury. Our wonderful community thanked them due to the initiative of Greg and Darren Curnow, by sponsoring a boat trip around the Recherche Archipelago and lunch at a local café, showing gratitude to the volunteers who had not only helped farmers get their fencing back up, but also lifted the spirits of many, and contributed significantly to rebuilding our community.

The time has now come for us to say goodbye. Blaze Aid became a part of our community and it was a bittersweet closing down celebration over the weekend as we said farewell and thanks to the Blaze Aid volunteers at Grass Patch. They contributed greatly to the recovery effort, forging many lifelong friendships along the way. Esperance will be forever grateful for the work they've done and I'd urge everyone to get behind this wonderful organisation, whether it's by donation or thinking of volunteering yourself to help rebuild a community that needs a bit of support after a natural disaster. You can find out more about BlazeAid on their website www.blazeaid.com.